

*Things to Do*  
*and*  
*Things to Think About*  
*in*  
*Manhattan Island*

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*By*  
FRANCES H. CURRAN  
(Wife of HENRY H. CURRAN,  
*Deputy Mayor of The City of New York*)

1937

*"I like to see a man proud of the  
place in which he lives,  
I like to see a man live so that his  
place will be proud of him."*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



## “NEW YEAR’S EVE”

*Circa 1865*

Colored Lithograph — *Artist: F. FUCHS*

*Publishers: CHR. KIMMEL & FORSTER*

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Museum of  
the City of New York

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SEYMOUR DURST

*t' Fort nieuw Amsterdam op de Manhatans*



FORT NEW AMSTERDAM



(NEW YORK), 1651.

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## *Manhattan Island*

My name is Manhattan Island. I am the "Old New York" of New York City, and I am still an island. For three hundred years people have been celebrating *Christmas* on me. I used to be wild and quiet, with game and fish, trees and flowers covering me and a few Indians walking around, smoking pipes and hunting. Then suddenly some Dutchmen, clumped in huts down on my southern tip, started having Christmas trees and music and parties and wassail. They have been at it ever since, they and the rest of them whenever the twenty-fifth day of December comes around.

The Indians, calling themselves Manhattans, lived further up the river, in huts that looked like wasps' nests, but they knew nothing about *Christmas*. You can see models of most of my old-time adventures up at the Museum of the City of New York, the Museum of the American Indian and the American Museum of Natural History, all of which, have much information about my Indians. You may also read an enticing book about me called "New York—Old and New", by Rufus Rockwell Wilson, published long ago. But now I'll go on with my story.

In 1609, Henry Hudson came in from the wide ocean and sailed up the North River alongside of me in a ship called the "Half Moon". He said my soil was Dutch! Later on, in 1626, another Dutchman, named Peter Minuit, bought me from the Indians for twenty-four dollars in beads and ribbons, and christened me "New Amsterdam".

### 1637 - 1687

In 1642, the early Dutchmen built the first church on me, and they called it the Church of St. Nicholas, because there was a tradition that St. Nicholas was the figure-head of the first ship that brought settlers and traders to Manhattan. "St. Nick" was said by the Dutch to be my patron Saint. Now, for the first time, Christmas bells rang out over me from a Church. I could feel the vibrations, even though I am so rocky.



This Church was built at the Battery, inside the fort. They also set up a government, and their City Hall was at Coenties Slip—do you know where that is? You can find it, if you try. They suffered under a Governor, Schout and Burgomasters. The last and best known of the Dutch Governors was Peter Stuyvesant. He wielded a wooden leg and I can hear him now pounding away on me.

Yes, old peg-leg, Peter Stuyvesant, was the last of the Dutch Governors, for the British had become jealous of all the furs the Dutch got from the Indians and decided to “obtain” me, and as much more land as possible, for themselves. This they did by bargaining, and I became part of the British Empire. They set up a new government in the same City Hall. They installed a Governor, Mayor, Sheriff and Aldermen, and they called me “New York.”

One of the things they did was to start the first post to Albany—once a month. I could feel the hoof beats of the post horses. Such a funny sound! Regular and resounding—different from the Dutch—the easy-going, stationary Dutch!

You can see rooms of the period both at the New Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Brooklyn Museum.

### 1687 - 1737

Now, this was a comparatively quiet time. The British were still in command, and a few more houses—crawling northward—were built upon me. I could hear the rumble of stages, which was another new sound, and the volunteer firemen rolled around with awfully noisy wheels on their pumpers. Pigs and cows roamed the streets and ate the garbage; but they are quiet beasts, and I didn't notice them much—if any.

### 1737 - 1787

In 1766, they built St. Paul's Church on Broadway, and that is one of my oldest buildings still standing. The thoughts of the

people on Sunday morning were not happy for the Revolution was coming upon them. The British were so grasping for money that they finally imposed the Stamp Tax. Then my people rioted all over me and I felt a terrible commotion. George Washington, such a consistently great man that he sometimes seems to be forgotten for that very reason, rode up from Virginia and over me on his way to take command of the Continental Army in Boston.

Then Thomas Jefferson, in 1776, wrote the Declaration of Independence. That was a big day, but my poor people, those who wanted to throw off England's yoke, had to go on fighting for seven years before they could do it. George Washington spent one of those *Christmases* at Valley Forge and all his friends in my churches had a hard time to be gay. But, finally, he won and my people were free. The British departed, beaten. That was another big day, and Washington took leave of his generals at Fraunces Tavern which still stands, restored, at the same spot. It's funny; but I could hear all they said through the ground. You can see Mme. Jumel's Mansion too—way uptown—where Washington had his headquarters. It was then owned by Roger Morris. Stephen Jumel bought it some thirty years later. You can see an old red house in Weehawken Street, also of this period, but with no history attached.

I was now part of a new nation—America!

## 1787 - 1837

The thirteen separate states now had to be joined in one government, for they could not get along with each going its separate way. Washington, in association with other great men, helped to do that too, by means of the Constitution. He was then chosen our first President, by the First Congress, which met at Federal Hall. He made his speech of acceptance from the balcony and you can see his statue now on the steps of the Sub-Treasury Building which stands on the same spot, at the corner of Wall and Nassau Streets. (Take a look at the Stock Exchange and Trinity Church when you are there.) There are

statues of him also on the Arch in Washington Square and one at Union Square. Fine portraits of him by Gilbert Stuart hang in the Museum of the City of New York and the University Club. And the most beautiful bridge in all the world, designed by Cass Gilbert, now spans the Hudson River in his name.

The finest men from the thirteen states walked to and fro upon me, while they were making the governmental machinery to run the country. I particularly liked the tread of Alexander Hamilton, and I could hear Gouverneur Morris driving down from the country, which is now called Morrisania.

The town began to grow in earnest and there were 60,000 people on me at the turn of the century. The present City Hall was built in 1810; but, even that, had ordinary stone on the north side instead of marble, because they never expected the City to grow farther north than the City Hall.

Here are tidbits: Washington Irving lived in Irving Place, and the house is still standing; Fenimore Cooper lived in Bleeker Street; the "Clermont"—a sort of ferry boat designed by Robert Fulton—made her first trip on the Hudson—by steam! Now and again there were riots about slavery and plagues of cholera and yellow fever, and great fires raging over me—and every twenty years a terrific financial panic, then and now and perhaps for ever more.

## 1837 - 1887

In this era American clipper ships—the fastest in the world—landed at my Battery. Newspapers were started. Jenny Lind sang in Castle Garden, which is now the Aquarium. Then there were more riots on me, draft riots this time, because the Civil War had started. Lincoln made a speech in Cooper Union that made him President, and, when he died, he was borne through my streets to the present City Hall where his body lay in state. I could hear people coming from far and wide to say good-bye to their great friend.



The elevated railroad was built, and the phenomenal growth of the City began. The "Tweed Ring" fell—left the country—and I heard their steps no more. I missed them not.

The Morse telegraph now ticked all over me and railroads shivered my timbers—but the rattle was mild, if I'd known it at the time. Steamships, getting bigger and bigger, docked alongside of me and people from many nations made their homes upon me. They liked my air and felt free.

### 1887 - 1937

And now I can hear the gay ladies of the Nineties, and feel the roll of their bicycles. Soon there came a heavier roll, and it was the automobile. But, then, what do you suppose they did? The worst yet. They dug away at me and made subways. Since then I have not been able to get a wink of sleep for the uproar. Also they built huge high loads of stone away up into the air and called them skyscrapers. The most beautiful of all, and one of the first, is the Woolworth Tower, also built by Cass Gilbert. They weigh heavy upon me—I hate them. Of course, my crazy people have dug away most of my flowers and trees. A few remain in Central Park, and, in some little spots, like the garden at Grace Church. But they are few, I miss my flowers and my trees—terribly.

But now came a blow. There had to be another war, this time the greatest of all. I could hear the soldiers marching aboard the boats as they sailed for France. But soon my streets were covered with a snow of paper. It was "Armistice Day", and the war was over!

Then in a little while there was more snow, and it was Lindbergh, back after he had made his first glorious flight alone over the Atlantic.

Immigration was greatly reduced in 1924, and that has made a great difference, not only in our own life, but the life of the world.

Of course, you will drive all the way along my west bank for the road is magnificent, but don't forget my east shore. You can keep on the river there most of the way too. The views of bridges and river life are thrilling, and the great hospitals in the "sixties" and "seventies" are magnificent testimonials of our present age.

## NOW

And now, on *Christmas Eve* you and I can hear music from all over the world out of the air. Isn't that a marvelous adventure for quiet earth? And we can hear the most beautiful *Carols* in the City at *Grace Church* on the corner of Broadway and Tenth Street, as I have for ninety-one years.

## FUTURE

But what am I going to be like in the *Christmases* to come? Are my towers going to be higher or lower? Will the town be "driving on the horn" more or less? Will or will not my air be full of planes? Will my people become finer and more united, or will there be forever war between those who have material wealth and those who wish they had it?

Shall I hold my place for a long time as the first city of America, or shall I even some day vanish like Troy and become covered again with my proper trees and flowers? What are *you* doing to improve the life of my people? What kind of flowers are you planting in your garden?

What lights are you hanging on your Christmas tree?

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